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MILLENNIALS' PERCEPTIONS OF GENDERED LANGUAGE FEATURES OF FACEBOOK COMMUNICATION

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ABSTRACT

The study examined millennials' perceptions of gendered language features in Facebook communication. A total of 60 millennials were presented with samples of Facebook messages and asked to guess the gender of the writer, and to give reasons for identifying the writer as female or male. The results showed that the participants correctly guessed the gender of 71.43% out of 14 Facebook commenters. The main markers of male language features are harsh language, straightforward and shorter comment length, certain topics of discussions, word choice, and social role. The harsh language refers to rough, animal references, and cursing. Male word choice is inclined towards negativity. On the other hand, the main markers of female language features are giving advice, longer comments, presence of emotions, supportiveness, soft spokenness, word choice and feminine topics of discussion. Female word choice is reflected in use of words like "whatever", certain modifications of spellings and use of selected swear words. The findings indicate distinctions between female and male language features in face-to-face communication which have persisted through time and are carried into the context of social media communication.

Keywords: Gendered language feature; Facebook communication; Malaysian millennials

Introduction

Social networking sites such as Facebook provide an online space for users to interact with one another. Communication on Facebook is primarily textual. Facebook also allows users to be anonymous if users decide not reveal too much of their personal information. Ellison et al. (2006) pointed out that the role of anonymity influences the behaviour of users which allows them to make comments via their online representation which may be different from their offline selves. Users may use language features that are not reflective of the female and male stereotypical language. In this